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Title : SURFACE BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES OF MARINE TUCUXIS TO TOURISM BOATS IN A PROTECTED AREA OF SOUTHERN BRAZIL.

Category : Conservation

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Abstract : The Environmental Protection Area of Anhatomirim (EPAA) is part of the home range of a population of the marine tucuxi dolphin (*Sotalia fluviatilis*), which is targeted by dolphin watching boats since the early 1980's. Located around 27°30'S and 48°31'W in southern Brazil, the EPAA was created in 1992 to help protect these dolphins and late in 1998 a 'no tourism boats or dolphin exclusive zone' was delimited. Since 1993, tucuxi's behavioral reaction to boats has been assessed by direct observations from a small inflatable boat. Dolphin's surface reaction were defined as negative (behavior changed/interrupted), positive (dolphins approach boat or bowride) or neutral (no recordable or visible reaction). In this study, 260 encounters were analyzed for the period 2000-2002. In 40% (n= 104) of encounters tucuxi's reacted negatively, while in only 0.08% (n = 2) encounters were positive reactions recorded. Neutral reactions corresponded to 59.2% (n = 154) of all encounters. Most encounters occurred during austral summer (55%, n = 143) and the large majority inside the dolphin's exclusive zone (88%, n = 231). There were no differences between reactions and type of approach or type of boat (Kruskal-Wallis test, $p > 0.05$). Individual identification from photographs show that the same animals have been encountered by boats over the years. Some results presented here contrast with previous data obtained from 1993-96 where the great majority of encounters (93.58% of 296 recorded) resulted in negative reactions. These may be a result of several factors including the shift in tucuxi use of the area and the regulations applied between the two periods of analysis. Nevertheless, dolphin watching regulations and management should be applied to all boat types in the area. Law enforcement and cetacean awareness especially targeted to boat operators and tourists are another key tools to contribute to the protection of this population.